



Exercise 4.3

Questions to Build Understanding



Facilitators can use questions to develop understanding of a particular issue. Figuring something out is a more powerful learning strategy than being told. This exercise enables resource professionals to practice developing questions they can use with interface audiences to better help them understand wildland-urban interface issues.

Objective: Participants will be able to develop questions that will help their audiences think through wildland-urban interface problems.

Materials:

Copies of *Worksheet 1: Questions to Build Understanding*
Fact Sheet 4.1: Communication Basics
Fact Sheet 4.2: Starting an Informal Presentation
Presentation 4.1

Time: 30 minutes

Before the training, revise *Worksheet 1: Questions to Build Understanding* to reflect the interface issues that are most relevant to your region and reword the sample questions to be most meaningful. Duplicate the worksheet so that you have one for every participant.

1. Use **Fact Sheet 4.1: Communication Basics**, **Fact Sheet 4.2: Starting an Informal Presentation**, and **Presentation 4.1** to explain to participants that resource professionals can design questions which guide an audience to define and solve interface problems. This type of interaction is often more effective in small group settings where individuals feel more comfortable speaking, sharing their experiences, and asking questions. When good questions are used to promote thinking and discussion, members of the audience can more easily figure out their own interface problems with the help of others in the group. This removes the resource professional from the role of the expert who is trying to persuade people to do something that they might not want to do. People are more likely to accept a solution that they participated in creating. This skill of asking a leading question is something that deserves practice. Good questions are usually planned. In this exercise, participants will discuss sample questions designed to help residents identify problems, suggest solutions, and generate their own questions.
2. Divide the group into small teams of 3 to 7 people and distribute your revised copy of *Worksheet 1*. Ask the groups to read and answer the questions for the first topic. How would interface residents answer these questions? What will residents realize when they stop to think about these two pieces of information at the same time?

3. Take a few minutes to review the responses of this first example in the large group, and then ask the training participants to use the other topics and samples on the list as a springboard to generate more questions for interface topics. They should practice their questions with another small group to work on the wording. The result will be a set of questions resource professionals can use with groups of residents.
4. Allow 10–15 minutes for the participants to generate new questions and choose several people to present their groups' ideas to the whole group. As they present their questions, ask them to model how they would use these questions with an audience. Model how to leave an appropriate amount of time for audience members to think and respond. (It is often awkward for presenters to leave enough “wait time” when they ask a question. Encourage your workshop participants to practice waiting until someone responds, or at least 5 seconds.)

Summary

A good set of questions can help an audience make sense of information and come to a better understanding of what you are presenting. Audience members can use their own experience and the technical information you provide to guide them to logical conclusions. Questions can help engage an audience in discussion and can encourage them to ask questions of the speaker. Their questions will direct you to information they want, priorities they have, and ways you can help them. That is often the intent of making the presentation. In addition, you may be able to discern if the audience has any misconceptions or incorrect information, which you may choose to address immediately or at another time.



Worksheet 1: Questions to Build Understanding

Use these samples to help generate questions you can use in interface presentations to enable your audience members to think through problems and design solutions.

For presentations on **nuisance wildlife**:

When do you usually see or hear animals in the neighborhood?

What do you think attracts wild animals to your area?

For presentations on maintaining **water quality**:

When it rains too hard for water to soak into the ground, where does that excess water (storm water) go?

Where does your drinking water come from?

For presentations on **landscaping for wildlife**:

Where is the closest place to your home for animals to find water?

If a hawk or coyote came near your home, where would small animals hide?

How many of the plants around your home provide fruits or nuts for wildlife?

For presentations on **native plants**:

What is an example of a native plant?

What normally prevents plant populations from growing out of control?

If one plant population expands out of control, what could be the effect on other plants?

For presentations on **prescribed fire**:

What are some of the factors that determine whether or not a prescribed fire can take place?

What are some of the things neighbors can do to avoid the bother of smoke and ash from a prescribed fire?

For presentations on **open space zoning**:

What views do you enjoy seeing as you drive in this area?

What historical and cultural values are special and should be protected from development?

What views are particularly unpleasant as you drive in the area?
